

APPENDIX C

HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF AFRTS

The inventive nature of the U.S. Service member resulted in the concept that has become AFRTS. The first military radio stations appeared in widely scattered overseas locations in the early days of World War II. Early records are incomplete since there was no official Government recognition of these broadcast operations. From these early radio stations came the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) in 1942.

The first transmitting radio station was placed on the air in December 1941 at Kodiak, Alaska. In less than six months, all program material at Kodiak had been exhausted and the resourceful Service members wrote to Hollywood stars requesting programs of any type. The actors and actresses gathered transcriptions but were unable to ship them due to security regulations. Undaunted, the stars called the War Department in Washington for permission to ship their programs to the Army station in Alaska. This was the first inkling to the War Department that the Army owned a radio station.

On May 26, 1942, AFRS was officially established with a mission of providing program services, shortwave programs, and equipment for overseas areas. AFRS was to give Service members a touch of home and to combat Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose. Because of its proximity to talent and recording facilities, Los Angeles was selected as the headquarters for AFRS with experienced military and civilian writers, producers, musicians, technicians and entertainers brought together to form the staff. Broadcasting executive Colonel Thomas H. Lewis (for whom the annual Colonel Tom Lewis Award for Outstanding Military Broadcasting is named) was selected as the first Commanding Officer of AFRS and he quickly molded the talent and the technical specialists into a highly professional unit.

In 1945, the height of WWII, there were about 300 radio stations scattered all over the world. The end of the war brought considerable reduction in the AFRS system. In 1949, only 60 AFRS stations were in operation.

With the advent of the Korean War in the early 1950's, and again, in Vietnam in the 1960's, the AFRS system quickly expanded to provide the combat forces with radio and when feasible, television service.

Armed Forces Television began at Limestone AFB, Maine, in 1953. From this experimental station, it was determined that overseas television stations were feasible and relatively inexpensive. Within 3 years, more than twenty television stations were placed on the air around the world.

In 1954, the television mission was recognized and AFRS became AFRTS - The Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. (On July 1, 1969, AFRTS was redesignated as the American Forces Radio and Television Service. On October 1, 1982, the title reverted to its original Armed Forces Radio and Television Service). Today, AFRTS operates over 800 outlets in approximately 60 countries, on ships at sea, and in U.S. territories and/or trusts, serving more than 1.5 million U.S. military personnel and their families.

